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FOREIGN RELATIONS

The Honorable Elaine L. Chao
Secretary
United States Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Chao,

I am writing to you today to bring your attention to an important measure that is currently pending at the Department of Transportation. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's proposed rule on heavy truck speed limiting devices has the potential to save thousands of lives each year, but has unfortunately been delayed by the administration's bureaucratic rulemaking process since 2011.

The stated purpose of the rule is "to reduce the severity of crashes involving these heavy vehicles and to reduce the number of resulting fatalities." We have an obligation to reduce the horrific crashes on our highways that kill and injure the citizens we are charged to protect. According to the National Safety Council, the number of motor vehicle fatalities climbed to as many as 40,000 in 2016, a 14 percent increase from 2014, and in my home state of Georgia, roadway fatalities increased by 10 percent in the past year. The number of crashes involving heavy commercial trucks has increased 44 percent since 2009. A study by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) concluded that trucks not limited by speed governors were in twice as many high-speed collisions as those with the technology activated. Another FMCSA report found that 40.3 percent of all fatal crashes involving large trucks in 2014 were at speeds of 60 miles per hour (mph) or higher.

The United States lags behind the rest of the technologically advanced world in this area. The European Union countries, Japan, Australia and the most populous Canadian provinces (Ontario and Quebec) all require speed governors to be set on heavy commercial vehicles at speeds varying from 55 mph in Japan to 65 mph in Canada. According to Ontario's Road Safety annual report in 2009, fatalities in crashes involving heavy trucks dropped 24 percent in the first full year the speed limiter rule requiring settings of 65 mph was in effect.

The "speed limiter rule" would have minimal cost, and the department has stated that the rule would decrease the estimated 1,115 fatal crashes a year involving vehicles with a weight of 26,000 pounds or more on roads with posted speed limits of 55 mph or more. The original publication date was expected in December 2011. However, subsequent delays extended the deadline for publishing the proposed rule. Although I was pleased to see a proposed speed limiter rule published for comment on September 7, 2016, I remain concerned that the rule would only apply to new trucks despite the fact that the majority of existing trucks on our roads already have the speed-limiting technology built into their systems.

As the number of motor vehicle deaths continues to rise, safety should remain the primary objective of the Department of Transportation. I hope you will expeditiously review and finalize the life-saving rule on heavy truck speed limiting devices.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Johnny Isakson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Johnny Isakson
United States Senator